

INTERACTIVE USER INTERFACE AND METHOD
FOR PREVIEWING MEDIA PRODUCTS

Application Background

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/169,974 filed December 10, 1999.

Background

Recorded music entertainment has become a commodity business thanks to a combination of historical catalogs and burgeoning new release schedule. Leading online music stores boast upwards of 500,000 songs for sale which makes it possible, potentially, to find a tune matching anybody's taste and expectation for any given time. The challenge for media content vendors is to provide an effective way for consumers to peruse their vast catalogs of digital media items available for sale to improve their Return-On-Investment. The currently utilized methods are linear in a way that consumers can search for their artist(s) of interest by the name or by genre. The limitations of this approach is that only a limited number of media items can be presented on display device for user selection at one time while the commonly employed technique of downloading or streaming a partial fragment of the media item for user preview involves several steps a media shopper typically has to undertake and an associated wait times which represents a serious negative as it's detrimental to a smooth shopping experience, particularly so for today's consumers known for their short attention span. The challenge therefore is to provide media product shoppers with a way to access broader body of information on media products' features in a seamless fashion to facilitate seamless shopping experience and improve media vendors' ROI. The invention described below addresses just such a need and provides a solution.

Description of the Invention

The present invention is an improved interactive user interface (hereinafter "User Interface") and method for previewing media products such as music, videos, movies, and electronic game programs, that features following characteristics:

- An individual media product available in the vendor's catalog is represented by a shortened, abbreviated version (hereinafter "Media Impression"), a fragment that captures a key characteristic of the product it represents. In a preferred embodiment, a Media Impression is the smallest recognizable fragment of a digital media product; for recorded music this can be a clip of about 3 sec length, for movies a few frames showcasing a key character, for games a key action scene.
- The user is presented with a two-dimensional arrangement (hereinafter "Active Surface") of distinct and disparate Media Impressions; the user is encouraged to explore the content by simply moving the interactive positioning indicator or cursor across the area.

- A piece of identifying information is displayed for each Media Impression at their particular spot on the Active Surface. That information may include digital media product's title, artist, producer, starring actor etc.
- As cursor traverses across the Active Surface the user experiences, in real time, immediate playback of respective Media Impressions.
- A combination of the immediacy of the resulting playback and the fact that Media Impressions assembled on the Active Surface are of distinct and disparate character provides for an amusing multimedia experience that keeps users engaged and encourages them to keep exploring digital media vendor's catalog.
- When user feels interested in a particular fragment they can linger on the spot for a few seconds as opposed to keep the cursor moving in which case the next fragment's playback will launch while the currently played one will shut off
- The user can restart a Media Impression's playback by momentarily moving out of and back into the spot.

While Stern in Prior Art teaches of using media clips representative of digital media products for preview of those, our method provides a major improvement in quality of user's experience. The method described herein provides for a truly immersive user's experience where we quantify the immersiveness as "number of media experiences in a given span of time and visual space"

Another key distinction is our method is "proactive", that is while a user is effectively wandering around the two-dimensional space of music clips (Media Impressions), music is played near-synchronously by recognizing where user's pointer device is while without any specific user action; on the contrary the approaches cited in Prior should be considered "reactive" as they actually require user to perform a certain action to initiate the preview playback.

- Due to physical limitations only a limited number of Media Impressions can be assembled on the Active Surface for presentation to the user at any one time, thus accounting for only a subset of the full vendor's catalog. The User Interface provides the user with the Paging function to navigate between subsets of Media Impressions projected onto Active Surface, such as Scroll Forward/Scroll that can fit on the Active Surface at one time.
- During Media Impression's playback while cursor is positioned at the respective media product's spot, the user can execute an Action Decision, such as, including but not limited to, initiate a purchase transaction, a launch of the product's streaming session, a product's download, by means provided by a particular hardware implementation, such as, included but not limited to, a mouseclick, Touchpad press, press of the Enter key, etc.